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Homemade } or READY-MIX } which?

by B. Mildred Nelson

GROCERY BUYING is serious business today. It's not only a question of how much each sack of groceries cost, but of how much food value goes home for the money spent. High food costs force most families to purchase only what's needed and no more.

One question many Iowa homemakers raise is: "Does it pay to buy the ready-mix products now on the market, or is it better to buy separate ingredients for the dish and make it all at home?"

This is a logical question. Ready-mix products on the market include cakes, pastries, main-dish combinations, muffins, rolls, pancake mixes, dessert mixes and other quick preparation foods. You can make almost an entire meal with these in short order. But how much difference in cost is there between homemade and ready-mix foods? Would the time you save make up for any higher cost of the ready-mix product? Does the food value of the prepared mix compare favorably with the same product made by a homemade recipe? Does the family like it just as well? And last, but not least, can you rely on your homemade recipes to come out practically perfect?

Read the Label

There are no ready-made answers to all these questions, of course. But here are some suggestions from women who are studying this phase of food buying. Study the weight of the package; note its cost and the amount of the particular product it makes. Check the list of ingredients on the package together with those you'll have to add to make the recipe complete. Then figure, as closely as you can, the cost of the product you obtain from the prepared mix in

relation to the total cost of the recipe you put together at home. Also divide the cost of each recipe by the amount (number of rolls, etc.) you get from it. This will give you a better idea of how much you are actually spending.

In some cases, Iowa homemakers have found that mixes are no more in cost than home-prepared foods. For example, a check of ready-mix or home-mix biscuits showed that they could be made at the same price. In most cases, however, homemade products call for the use of more eggs, milk and possibly fats. Thus although the home recipe may cost as much in some cases, the food value may be higher.

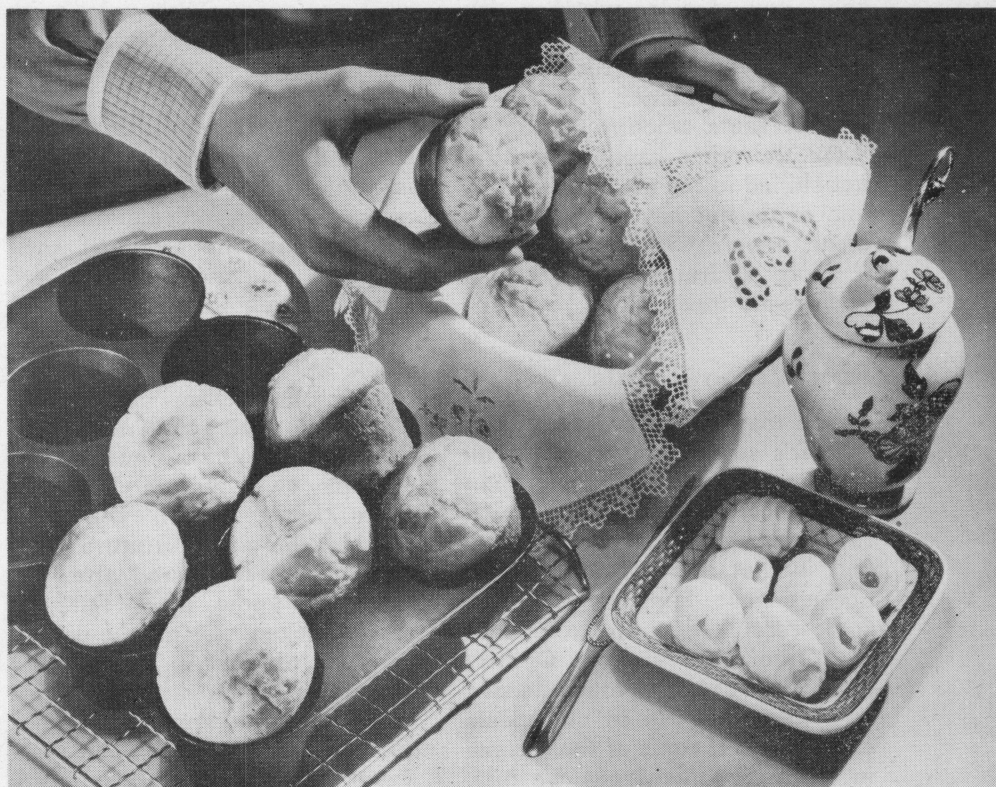
If, as is done in many homes, the prepared mix is used with the addition of more eggs and milk, the total cost of the food might

even be higher. Thus the deciding factor may be what the family likes best. Usually, however, homemade recipes prove less costly for average size families.

Consider Yield

It pays to know, too, just how much a recipe will yield according to the number of ounces you buy. Cake mixes are an interesting example. The weight, according to different brands, may vary from 14 to 20 ounces. The price may differ as much as 8 to 10 cents. Yet the estimated yield may be the same. Most cake mixes yield two 8-inch layers which give six to eight good sized servings. A careful check of the ingredients listed on the package in relation to those you use in your favorite recipe at home will

Results may be a little more uniform with ready-mixed—if you are an inexperienced cook. But many homemakers prefer the homemade recipes.





If your family calls for large recipes, you probably can save by mixing your own. But for small amounts, ready-mixed recipes may save time.

help you decide whether it's wiser to whip up your own cakes. Perhaps your own recipe gives you a larger, tastier, richer cake for the same amount of money.

On the other hand, if you are not skilled in the art of cake making, or do not have much equipment to work with, you may find it more desirable to rely on a good ready-mix recipe.

Food Value Counts

You may wonder at this point why it's so necessary to take all these factors into consideration when there are other foods which the family gets at mealtime. The fact is that a well-balanced diet doesn't just happen. It takes some careful planning to be sure that riboflavin, vitamin C, iron and all the other much-needed nutrients show up in our meals every day. If some of them come in the ready-mix foods we buy,

well and good. If they don't, it's all the more important that we make sure they are present in other foods we serve.

One way we can check up on the food value of ready-mix foods is to note the labels on the packages. The ingredients must all be given in the order of their weights. The Federal Food and Drug Act requires this.

In some cases enriched flour, whole milk solids, eggs and buttermilk are basic ingredients. These are good substantial foods like the ones you would use in your own recipes. On the other hand, when you find a chicken soup mixture that has the chicken listed after the salt, you know there can't be much chicken. Or maybe pork is listed as the last ingredient in a main-dish combination. Then you know the amount of pork must be very small. Even meat flavor may come from a hydro-

lized vegetable protein. It tastes good but offers less food value.

Compare Meal Costs

Although you can find prepared food mixes as inexpensive as your own, that is not generally true. Suppose we take a typical family meal and do some figuring. The menu might include baked beans and wieners, buttered broccoli, parsley potatoes, head lettuce salad, French dressing, Boston brown bread, butter, devil's food cake with fudge frosting and milk.

You can purchase all of this menu except the lettuce and milk in ready-prepared form or fix it entirely at home. The family may not even be able to detect any differences in quality or flavor. But homemakers who compared notes on these recipes liked some of the homemade products much better.

When you count up the costs, you'll find that you can save money by spending a little extra time in your kitchen. In fact, you can save about one-third to one-half of the cost of the meal by baking the beans and wieners yourself, cleaning fresh broccoli, peeling the potatoes, making the cake, bread and dressing.

Your saving in cash—not counting time—according to our figures will run about 15 cents per person. If you have a family of four that's 75 cents. For a family of eight, that would mean a saving of \$1.25 for each meal.

Many times the number of folks you have to feed makes a big difference. If there are large demands on the pancake, waffle or muffin recipes you stir up, you may find that a box of ready-prepared food won't last any time at all. For the money involved, it might be wiser to make a batch of pancakes from your own recipe.

The opposite might be true if your family is small and makes no big demands on any recipe. In that case, ready-mix food may more than pay for itself.

You know your own circumstances. But if you're having food budget troubles, sit down and do some figuring before you decide which home prepared or ready-mixed foods to use.